

Celebrating and Commemorating Local Black History



PUBLIC PROGRAM

Saturday, February 24 at 1:00 PM

A Family's Journey into the Life and Legacy of The Honorable Armistead S. Nickens

(see details inside)

L. R. Flemings and Lancaster's Afro-American Fair

by Karen Hart, LVHS executive director

(A version of this article previously appeared in the *Rappahannock Record* 2-14-2022)

"Come to the Big Afro-American Fair" was the headline of an advertisement in the October 12, 1900, issue of the local *Virginia Citizen* newspaper. The event on a fairgrounds near Monaskon, in upper Lancaster County, promised to have "Horse, Wheel-Barrow, Sack and Foot Races" plus hot-air balloons and baseball games.

According to EncyclopediaVirginia.org historian Brent Tarter, black residents of Lancaster organized Afro-American Fairs like this from the late 1890s to about 1911. The event was revived in 1927 when the black population was banned from attending the Chesapeake Fair, which had become established in Kilmarnock.

The *Rappahannock Record* newspaper for October 27, 1927, contained both a full-page advertisement for the Chesapeake Fair on November 1-4, and a quarter-page advertisement for the Afro-American Fair to be held mid-week November 8-10. The Northern Neck Progressive Association's "first annual Domestic, Educational, Industrial, and Agricultural Fair" would be held at their new fairgrounds in the Brookvale area between Lancaster Court House and Kilmarnock. The ad stated, "The managers of this association will spare no pains to make this one [of] the greatest colored fairs ever held in the Northern Neck of Virginia."

The list of attractions "to amuse the young and old" included various races for horses, people, and automobiles, pig and rabbit chases, baseball games, a twenty-man tug of war, clay pigeon shooting, a merry-go-round, and "sideshows of all kinds." Attendees could also enjoy music by the Colored Brass Band from Richmond and refreshments "to appease your appetite and quench your thirst at prices to suit the times." *(continued on next page)*

COME TO THE BIG AFRO-AMERICAN FAIR

To be held on the Fair Grounds
at Roadview, near Monaskon, on
the 25, 26 and 27 of October.



Horse, Wheel-barrow, Sack and Foot
Races each day. Some of the finest horses
in the Northern Neck will be on the track.
Balloon ascensions and match games of
Base-ball every day.

Remember the dates, October 25, 26
and 27, and be sure to attend.

L. R. FLEMING,

Manager.

(Continued from front page)

Come to the big
Afro-American Fair
November 8-9-10, 1927

The Northern Neck Progressive Association will hold its first annual Domestic, Educational, Industrial and Agricultural Fair at the beautiful new fair grounds on the highway between Lancaster C. H. and Kilmarnock, Lancaster County, Virginia, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, November 8-9-10, 1927.

The managers of this association will spare no pains to make this one of the greatest colored fairs ever held in the Northern Neck of Virginia. Below we mention some of the attractions we have arranged to have on the fair grounds to amuse the young and old, viz: Horse Racing, trotting and running races, Automobile races, Wheelbarrow races, Sack races, Foot races, Rabbit chase, Pig chase, Tarropin races, Tug-of-war between twenty men from the counties of Lancaster and Northumberland, match games of Baseball between Mollusk team and any other teams desiring to play for handsome purse, Clay Pigeon shooting matches, a Merry-go round and sideshows of all kinds will be on the grounds. And the best of all will be the Colored Brass Band from Richmond, Va. will furnish music two days if not three. This band has played for some of the big Conventions in Atlantic City, N. J. Everybody should take a day off and hear this wonderful band. Refreshments of all kinds will be served on the grounds to appease your appetite and quench your thirst at prices to suit the times. We expect some of the best trotting horses from Middlesex County to come over and compete with the trotters of Northern Neck for the handsome purses to be awarded in every race. Remember there will be purses given in every race and contest. Ample space for parking automobiles will be provided. All school children 14 yrs. and under admitted free on 2nd day of fair.

We invite everybody to take a day off and come to the big colored fair. Meet old friends and make new acquaintances and have a good time on the inside.

Dr. M. E. Norris, Pres. A. T. Wright, Sec. L. R. Flemings, Mgr.

Committee: W. H. Dudley, J. A. Williams, C. R. Bromley, Mrs. B. E. Gray, F. A. Wiggins, Mac C. Seamon and Rosevelt Lewis.

ADMISSION: ADULTS 25 cts., CHILDREN 15 cts.

L. R. Flemings served as a manager of both the earlier and later versions of the Afro-American Fair and contributed to the popular success of the events. Flemings was born circa 1857-1861 into a free black or mulatto family. He lived in the Mollusk area and was married to Sarah Jane Griffin from 1883 until her death in 1910. They had thirteen children. He was later married to a woman named Alice, for whom no other records have been found. Different years of the census list Flemings as a storekeeper, retail grocer, and magistrate (justice of the peace). Several documents and family sources state his first name as Leonard, but some records show Lemuel or Lem, and his surname also appears in some records as Fleming, but the name he used in his signature was L. R. Flemings.

Flemings served as a justice of the peace for Lancaster County from about 1887 to 1919 and from 1927 to his death in 1937, hearing minor civil and petty criminal cases. It is possible that he served continuously through the 1920s, but the records are incomplete. Tarter states, "Flemings was almost certainly the longest-serving black public official in Virginia's history prior to the Voting Rights Act of 1965." The citizens of Lancaster elected him

justice of the peace every four years "for at least thirty-two years despite widespread efforts in Virginia to disfranchise African American men." Flemings' record of public service was particularly remarkable for the time period and Tarter contends that during that era it "might have been regarded as shocking news elsewhere in Virginia, that an African American man repeatedly won election."

Flemings also served as county registrar of vital statistics for more than a decade [his signature can be seen on numerous birth certificates filed with the state], a coroner, a member of the county grand jury, and a delegate to the 1896 Republican Party state convention. In an obituary notice on the front page of the April 12, 1937 *Rappahannock Record*, the (white) editor wrote that Flemings "dispensed justice impartially to one and all alike" and that "as a leader among those of his race he was respected by all who knew him."

**COLORED JUSTICE OF
PEACE DIES AT HOME**

Lemuel R. Flemings, 77, highly respected colored man of Mollusk died at his home Saturday and was buried Monday.

Elected justice of the peace by the citizens of the district he served for several terms and dispensed justice impartially to one and all alike.

As a leader among those of his race he was respected by all who knew him.



**Explore more Black History resources and find free videos
of previous LVHS lectures and presentations at
<https://lancastervahistory.org/blackhistory>**

Museum and Library Seasonal Closure

Museum is closed to visitors until April 3.

Research Library is closed until March 1 (then open by appointment only).

Winter Office Hours vary as staff continue administrative and behind-the-scenes projects,
but may work some days off-site.

PUBLIC PROGRAM:

A Family's Journey into the Life and Legacy of The Honorable Armistead S. Nickens



A panel of descendants, coordinated by Francine Aytes Hunter and Brenda Campbell, will speak about their ancestor, Armistead S. Nickens, and their experiences of discovering and commemorating their family history. They will discuss various ways to engage with the past, including their efforts to obtain a Virginia Historical Highway Marker that was dedicated in 2022.

**Hosted by Lancaster Virginia Historical Society and The Nickens Family
Saturday, February 24, 2024**

1:00 PM (doors open 12:30), In-Person & Zoom*

Lancaster Community Library, 16 Town Centre Dr, Kilmarnock, 2nd floor (elevator accessible)

Free Admission. Donations appreciated to benefit the Historical Society.

***More Info and Zoom Access: www.LancasterVaHistory.org 804-462-7280**

The Honorable Armistead S. Nickens (ca. 1836-1906) was Lancaster's first Black elected official, serving two terms in the Virginia House of Delegates, 1871-1875.

Born into a free family, his ancestors included at least 12 veterans of the Revolutionary War.

He is credited with establishing one of the county's first schools for African Americans.

According to oral history, he was also an early advocate of what later became the Downing Bridge.



**Nickens
Family**

*Zoom Access



LVHS Supports NNK250!

NNK250 kicks off in February 2024 with its first Signature Speaker Series.

NNK250 is a 4-year regional Commemoration of the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution and its legacy in American history, offering a variety of activities organized by a coalition of representatives from Northern Neck tourism, museums, historic sites, cultural groups, education, economic development, and government agencies. Visit nnk250.us



2024 Signature Speaker Series

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All programs are free and start at 2:00pm
For more information visit nnk250.us

	<p>February 11, 2024 <i>Conflict, Migration, and Early Settlement of the Northern Neck</i></p> <p>University of Mary Washington Dahlgren Campus 4224 University Drive, King George, VA</p>
<p>Dr. Barbara Heath University of Tennessee</p>	
	<p>March 10, 2024 <i>A Place Apart: Bound Labor in Virginia's Upper Northern Neck 1645-1702</i></p> <p>Historic Christ Church 420 Christ Church Road, Weems, VA</p>
<p>Dr. Steve Harris-Scott George Mason University</p>	
	<p>April 14, 2024 <i>Finding Leedstown: What Archaeology Reveals about this Remarkable Place</i></p> <p>Rice's Hotel/Hughlett's Tavern 73 Monument Place, Heathsville, VA</p>
<p>Dr. Julie King St. Mary's College</p>	
	<p>May 5, 2024 <i>Indigenous Perspectives on the Northern Neck and Power of Place</i></p> <p>The Lodge at Cat Point Creek 2570 Newland Road, Warsaw, VA</p>
<p>Chief Anne Richardson Rappahannock Tribe</p>	
	<p>June 9, 2024 <i>The Leedstown Resolutions: Connecting Consumerism and Revolution in the Northern Neck</i></p> <p>George Washington Birthplace National Monument 1732 Popes Creek Road, Colonial Beach, VA</p>
<p>Dr. Phil Levy University of South Florida</p>	